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SUBJECT: NEW REFERENDUM POLLING FIGURES

CLASSIFIED BY: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR MARK WELLS FOR REASONS 1.4 (D
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SUMMARY

11. (C) GREENBERG, ROSNER AND QUINLAN (GRQ) SHOWED THE OPPOSITION THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF ITS LATEST POLL REGARDING THE AUGUST 15 REFERENDUM. THE FIGURES SHOW THAT VOTERS ARE SPLIT 48-TO-48 ON WHETHER TO RECALL PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ. GRQ REP MARK FEIERSTIEN CONTENDED THAT WITH THE ECONOMY DOING WELL AND CHAVEZ APPEARING INCREASINGLY DEMOCRATIC AFTER CALLING FOR THE REFERENDUM, THE OPPOSITION MUST ESTABLISH ITS ELECTORAL MESSAGE, WHICH SHOULD FOCUS ON CHAVEZ'S DISMAL RECORD ON JOBS, SOCIETAL UNITY AND CRIME. END SUMMARY.

PRELIMINARY FIGURES

12. (C) MARK FEIERSTIEN OF GREENBERG, ROSNER AND QUINLAN (GRQ) TOLD POLOFF ON JUNE 24 THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF GRQ'S LATEST POLL REGARDING THE AUGUST 15 PRESIDENTIAL RECALL REFERENDUM. THE FIGURES, COLLECTED AFTER THE REFERENDUM WAS CONVOKED, SHOW THAT LIKELY VOTERS ARE SPLIT 48-TO-48 OVER WHETHER TO RECALL PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ. FEIERSTIEN OFFERED THREE REASONS FOR THE FIGURES. FIRST, CHAVISTAS ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE NOW THAT THERE IS A REFERENDUM. SECOND, THE ECONOMY HAS DONE WELL IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS, WITH HIGH OIL PRICES AND MASSIVE SOCIAL SPENDING. LASTLY, BY GOING FORWARD WITH THE REFERENDUM, CHAVEZ DEMONSTRATED HIS "COMMITMENT" TO DEMOCRACY AND WON HIMSELF INCREASED SUPPORT. FEIERSTIEN SAID CHAVEZ WOULD WIN THE REFERENDUM IF THESE TRENDS ARE NOT ARRESTED NOW.

A MESSAGE TO THE OPPOSITION

13. (C) FEIERSTIEN SAID HE DELIVERED THESE RESULTS TO A SELECT GROUP OF SENIOR OPPOSITION REPRESENTATIVES. HE OBSERVED THAT THE OPPOSITION HAS TO FOCUS ITS REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN AGAINST CHAVEZ AND HIS DISMAL RECORD ON JOBS, SOCIETAL UNITY AND CRIME. HE ASSERTED THE OPPOSITION SHOULD STAY AWAY FROM THE ISSUES OF DEMOCRACY, AS CHAVEZ APPEARS MORE DEMOCRATIC AFTER CALLING THE REFERENDUM. CORRUPTION IS ALSO A POOR THEME, FEIERSTIEN SAID, UNLESS A MAJOR SCANDAL ERUPTS DIRECTLY IMPLICATING CHAVEZ. THOSE POLLED DID NOT VIEW CHAVEZ AS CORRUPT, RATHER BELIEVING THE OPPOSITION TO BE WORSE. FEIERSTIEN ALSO CONTENDED THAT THE OPPOSITION SHOULD NOT SPEND EXCESSIVE TIME WRANGLING OVER THE ISSUES OF VOTING MACHINES AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS, BUT SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON ESTABLISHING ITS ELECTORAL MESSAGE.

COMMENT

14. (C) THE POLL IS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE IT IS THE FIRST "POST-REPAROS" POLL. CHAVEZ GOT A BUMP OUT OF ACCEPTING THE REFERENDUM. PREVIOUS POLLS ALSO MAY NOT HAVE ACCURATELY GAUGED THE COMMITMENT OF CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS, WHO DID NOT BELIEVE THERE WOULD BE A REFERENDUM. ADMITTEDLY, GRQ IS SELLING ITS SERVICES AS AN ELECTORAL CONSULTANT AND THIS IS ITS SALES PRESENTATION. HOWEVER, THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: CHAVEZ IS FAR FROM FINISHED AND THE OPPOSITION HAS A TOUGH CHALLENGE AHEAD. SHAPIRO

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